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SUBJECT: ITALY SEES LITTLE TRACTION IN EU FOR MORATINOS INITIATIVE

REF: MADRID 2776

Classified By: Pol M/C David D. Pearce, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) A senior MFA official November 2 provided Pol M/C with Italy's read on the recent Mediterranean Forum conference in Alicante, Spain. Luciano Pezzotti, director of the MFA's Middle East office, had accompanied FM D'Alema to the session. He said the GOI found the format of the meeting unsatisfactory, terming it "a one-shot exercise". While there was considerable homogeneity of views among the Europeans, he said, the presence of the Arab countries "risked taking us somewhere we didn't want to go." He added, "we speak a different language". He cited in particular Arab reticence about expressing support for Abu Mazen.

¶2. (C) Pol M/C noted that Spanish FM Moratinos appeared not to want to be "limited" by the Roadmap and that the conference statement had called for its revision and update.

Pezzotti said that Moratinos grandly referred to the conference paper as the "Alicante Declaration", but he stressed nothing had been signed and the document was not binding on anyone. He termed the meeting a "brainstorming session". There was agreement on the general need for movement on the peace process, but not on how to do so.

¶3. (C) He thought Spain would likely raise the Alicante paper at the "Quint" meeting of EU countries (Spain, France, Italy, Germany, UK) in Madrid November 10, but Pezzotti doubted it would have much traction. The French, as well as Italy, were unenthusiastic, and he expected the UK and Germany would be as well. European solidarity had to be maintained; "we don't want to appear to be working in parallel to the Quartet".

¶4. (C) Pol M/C expressed surprise at the call for an international conference when the obvious immediate priority, and essential prerequisite for anything else, was progress on the ground. Pezzotti said he had told the meeting exactly that: they had to keep their feet on the ground, because "without the US and Israel we go nowhere." He said the Spanish want to push the US to move, but the GOI had told them this was not the way. Pol M/C asked about FM D'Alema's views on the meeting. Pezzotti said the minister and Moratinos were long-time friends. But D'Alema was also realistic. He knew the meaning of the "declaration"; he had wanted something "more practical -- these were just words, no new ideas." And D'Alema understood it was important to keep the US on board. Any effort without the US was condemned to fail.

¶5. (C) Comment: We spoke to Pezzotti before he went with D'Alema to Alicante, reminding him of A/S Welch's message that progress on the ground was what was needed now. He says he sounded that theme during the talks. In his readout, he

was at some pains to stress that the "Alicante Declaration" was unlikely to gain much headway in the EU, as well as the GOI view that the meeting did not represent the birth of a new group or forum. But Pezzotti also acknowledged that D'Alema was the only other European minister to attend. And even if Italy has some reservations on the format, content, and timing of the Alicante discussions, the Italian minister likely shares with Moratinos the conviction that the two countries should continue to press their EU partners and the US on the issue.

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